

“Take Up Your Cross” (Matthew 16:21-28)(3.15.20)

Matthew 16:21-28

21 From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

22 Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!”

23 Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”

24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. 26 What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? 27 For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done. 28 I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

The word of God for the people of God.

Title: “Take Up Your Cross”

LET US PRAY.

INTRODUCTION:

In my A.W. Tozer devotion this past Monday he chose 2 Corinthians 4:10 for the daily verse:

Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest.

Tozer writes, “Not everyone agrees with me that full qualification for eternity is not instant or automatic or painless.

I can only hope that you are wise enough, desirous enough and spiritual enough to face up to the truth that every day is another day of spiritual preparation, another day of testing and discipline with our heavenly destination in mind.

I hope, too, that you may begin to understand why many evangelical churches are in such a mess. It has become popular to preach a painless Christianity and automatic saintliness. It has become a part of our “instant” culture—“just pour a little water on it, stir mildly, pick up a gospel tract, and you are on your Christian way!”

“Lo,” we are told, “this is Bible Christianity!”

“It is nothing of the sort!”

To depend upon that kind of a formula is to experience only the outer fringe, the edge of what Christianity really is. For when the new birth is real and the wonder of regeneration has taken place, then comes the lifetime of preparation with the guidance of the Holy Spirit!"

BODY:

I believe that Arthur Blessitt would agree with Tozer. On Blessitt's website he has this statement: "At the cross, the worst of man met the Best of God."

This is the 53rd year of Blessitt carrying the cross around the world in every nation. 1968-2020. It is the Guinness World Record for the longest walk and pilgrimage. Over 43,326 miles (69,726 km) in 324 countries, island groups & territories. This journey is about sharing Jesus, the cross and the gospel message. He says, "My wife Denise has driven in front with supplies and has been with me in 294 countries."

At the cross I have witnessed hundreds of thousands if not millions receive Jesus as Savior and Lord. I have been arrested 24 times, been in 52 nations at war, been hit by cars, attacked by a crocodile, baboons, an elephant and green mamba snake. Met heads of state and slept on the roadsides and in the jungles in a hammock; have had honor and dishonor, love and hate, kindness and beating. The paths of the cross along the roads have taken me over one and a half times around the world at the equator...walking.

I have had the greatest of joy and the pain of hurt so bad that all I could do was use my Bible as a pillow at night. Walking and following Jesus and the cross have made me the most blessed person on this earth.

The cross weight has shaped my shoulder and built up about an inch of bone growth for a cushion for the cross. The cross has shaped my body but most important it has shaped my life! This is most important.

How has the cross shaped you? For me when criticism and praise affect you the same you are beginning to get free! I have learned to just follow Jesus and do His will and call and take the consequences. What I mean is that if you carry the cross all day you get tired. If it rains you get wet, in the desert you get cold. Some people will love you and some will hate you. I've learned to stay focused on Jesus and leading people to Jesus and that's joy for me and it causes rejoicing in heaven when one person comes to Jesus.

From the movie "The Cross" and even from the book by the same name you see how I faced struggles and even death. Insecurity has been my constant companion for all these years. Yet I am secure in Jesus. He is enough. My material treasures are few, mostly photos and things people gave me along the roads. You can never take advantage of me because I have given it all to Jesus. I've never considered the cost of loving and following in Jesus a

sacrifice but a glorious pleasure.

Samuel Chadwick: Acceptance of the Cross is a proclamation that its bearer stands in the midst of a sinful and burdened world in Christ's stead.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

- If & would (Jesus doesn't nail anyone to their cross)
- Anyone (anyone, any that would choose)
- Come after & follow me (Jesus is the guide and beacon)
- Must (absolutely necessary)
- Deny himself (renounce)
- Take up his cross (not Jesus', yours)

→ Arthur Blessitt sees a blind man in the crowd.

(show video)

→ Catharine & William Booth:

Likely you know that Catharine and William Booth are the founders of the Salvation Army. What you may not know is that they started as Methodists in ministry. They found the Methodists argued too much and looked for another ministry to serve God.

William grew up poor and had a real heart for those that struggled to live day to day. He would work days and preach on the streets at night. They started their evangelistic work without any financial support. Once they established a reputation through their preaching they did get financial backing.

Persecution was great from the beginning. Hoodlum boys and drunken loafers threw fireworks through the windows of the warehouse that housed their ministry; sometimes they would pour gunpowder in the room and create a blinding flash by setting fire to it. Gangs frequently hurled mud and stones through the windows at the preacher and the crowd. The liquor dealers worked hard to have Booth kicked out of East London. The police were no help; in fact, they often broke up outdoor meetings and accused Booth's followers of being the cause of all the trouble.

By 1878 their Christian Mission became the Salvation Army. William Booth assumed the title of "General." A thorough organization was created and publications such as the War Cry were instituted. But persecution continued to plague Booth and his army. One Salvation Army officer came into a meeting loaded down with dead cats and rats; he explained these had been thrown at him, and that he caught and held the dead animals because if he dropped them the crowd would merely pick them up to throw again.

Pots of human urine were often dumped on the street preachers. Beatings were not uncommon: in 1889, at least 669 Salvation Army members were assaulted — some were killed and many were maimed. Even children were not immune; ruffians threw lime in the eyes of a child of a Salvation Army member. The newspapers ridiculed Booth.

Soon a band of thugs and ruffians organized themselves into the “Skeleton Army” and devoted themselves to disrupting the meetings of the Salvation Army. They often attacked Salvation Army members as they paraded through the streets or held open-air meetings. They frequently stormed Salvation Army meeting halls by the hundreds, broke out the window panes, and wrecked the inside of the buildings. At first the police did little to stop the “Skeleton Army.” Instead of helping they frequently harassed Booth and his followers. The beginning of change in public attitude came with the expansion of the Salvation Army’s social service activities. Booth had always been dedicated to evangelism and he never wavered in this dedication. But the horrible conditions of the poor made him realize that as a Christian he had to do something to alleviate their suffering. In spite of all of the arguments to the contrary, he commanded his army to move to meet the needs of the poor. In response to such needs, Booth moved with zeal to establish numerous services and institutions. A list of all his programs would fill several pages. He set up programs for the starving, for the drunkards, for the poor, for the unemployed, for the homeless, for the criminals, for the prostitutes, for the sick, for missing persons, for the emotionally disturbed, and for the uneducated. He established factories, farms, training schools for emigrants, and loan services. He did not claim that his efforts would eliminate poverty, but he hoped that they would alleviate the suffering caused by an economic system which plunged millions into poverty.

Catherine participated fully in the Salvation Army: leading and preaching. She also raised eight children – All this while suffering from debilitating problems with her spine.

– Nick the Good Samaritan (show video of cross)

God is moving in Nick’s life. He was driving down Moss Mill Rd. towards the light when he saw the cross in the ditch beside the road. Finish story

– Samuel Chadwick: When the Church is passionless the world is indifferent, but an indifferent world is impossible where the Church is impassioned.

– Dr. Italy: Wanted to teach young people about Christian service. He recounts the lesson like this:

Unless hearts are converted, we don’t win. So, being someone that likes a challenge, I decided to see just how high we could set the bar for Christian charity. The early church

always did things the hard way, so I thought that would be a good place to start. I did some research and found the story of Cyprian's Plague in Rome.

This plague, which many scientists believe to have been smallpox, raged from 250AD through 280AD. Quoting the Bishop of Carthage from that day "At its height the epidemic is estimated to have killed 5,000 people a day in the city of Rome alone. Among them were two Roman emperors: Hostilian and Claudius II Gothicus."

Bishop Cyprian described the effects of the plague on the human body: "The intestines are shaken with a continual vomiting; the eyes are on fire with the infected blood; that in some cases the feet or some parts of the limbs are taken off by the contagion of diseased putrefaction. In many cases, blindness and deafness followed for those that survived.

The author of a CNN article believes that this plague contributed to the growth of Christianity because nothing makes you convert faster to a religion than facing your own mortality. To him, Christianity just happened to be in the right place at the right time. Any other religion would have experienced the same growth.

Rodney Stark, the author of the book *The Rise of Christianity*, agrees that the Christian faith delivered a view of the afterlife that was highly attractive in such an unstable time. He writes that "though the plague terrified the pagans, Christians greeted the epidemic as merely "schooling and testing." Thus, at a time when all other faiths were called to question, Christianity offered explanation and comfort.

He goes on to say, however, that "Even more importantly, Christian doctrine provided a prescription for action." Here is a first-hand account of the Christian community that heroically transformed into a battalion of nurses. "Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbors and cheerfully accepting their pains," he explains.

That, my friends, is what Christian service looks like. Christian service is not something you do in your spare time. Christian service is a radical commitment to lay down your life for your neighbor. Stark goes on to estimate that in communities without a strong Christian nursing presence, 30% of the population died from the plague. In contrast, communities with a strong Christian presence, only 10% died from the plague. In Rome, when 5,000 people were dying every day, that is a difference of 1,500 vs 500. That's 1000 lives saved a DAY. How many of those survivors do you think might have converted to Christianity? PROBABLY A LOT."

Dr. Italy concludes: "I'm taking three points from this that I wanted to communicate to my kids.

1. CHRISTIAN SERVICE IS RADICAL

Volunteers give their spare time. Christians give their entire lives to service.

2. CHRISTIAN SERVICE IS A WITNESS

Volunteers serve to impact the physical world, Christians serve to impact the spiritual world. We serve in order to make Christ's love known the way that He loved us.

3. CHRISTIAN SERVICE IS A WAR

We are an army and we do have an enemy. We have been commissioned to make the earth look as much like Heaven as we can. When we pray The Lord's Prayer, we say the following so often that we can sometimes forget what we're saying and what we're really praying for: "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." In Heaven, there is no sickness. There is no despair, there is no poverty. Those are our enemies, and we fight our enemies to the death. That is what Christian service looks like.

Lock and load, people."

Surely you can see an exact application this very day.

CONCLUSION:

Jesus promises, "Whoever loses his life for me will find it." In the gospel of Luke, Jesus says, "Take up our cross daily and follow him." I ask you, "Are you finding your life daily? Are you following Jesus? Are you carrying YOUR cross?"

Amen and amen. Let us pray.